rewrite

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Book 3: The Last Place You Look (Part II)

The gang has went through so much together; venturing into unknown locations, escaping the claws of death and danger and now, finally they are one step closer to finding the last and most exclusive member of the Order of the Stone.

Now, they find themselves in one of the most dangerous and unknown locations known to mankind; the End in order to reach their goal. Will they accomplish this task? Will they be able to convince him to join their quest in saving the world from appending doom? And will they be able to overcome their personal issues?

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◦●●◉✿ Chapter 1: Childhood Issues 3.0 ✿◉●●◦

The trio's eyes filled with shock and disbelief when they spotted what was sitting on the other side. They slowly crept inside the room that resembled a storage room, chests stacked against the walls with many bookshelves sitting around here and there. The music still played, which alerted the trio that the person they're looking for was still there.

"I call that one, Sympathy in E. A new composition to celebrate my newest discovery!" A familiar voice bubbled. Chris' eyes widened as he realized who the voice belonged to.

"That's him!" He gasped.

"Soren!" Jess murmured as the voice continued speaking. The trio ran toward the source of the voice, their spirits rising but this quickly washed away when they realized the voice didn't come from Soren, but instead from a jukebox.

"What the-." Chris frowned.

"It's just a recording!" Jess said, now starting to get frustrated. Chris was disappointed, but Olivia however was beyond upset.

"After all that! He's not even HERE?!" She complained. "We came all this way, and for what? We're no closer to Soren than before!"

"Well, this record didn't turn on by itself.." Jess pointed out.

"Jess has a point. In that case, he must still be here somewhere," Chris figured.

"Really? I guess he really likes the sound of his own voice, then," Olivia huffed.

"Maybe there's something useful on this record.. if I can figure out what he's talking about.." Jess murmured. Without another word, the trio listened to the recording, hoping that it'll help lead them somewhere.

"I've worked on a simple set of building instructions to.. 'inspire' them. I will disguise myself and hide among them in order to observe them more closely."

"Huh. 'Hide among them?'" Jess repeated, puzzled. "Hide among WHO?"

"Uh.. Jess? Do you think Soren is talking about.. THEM?" Olivia said, her eyes widened in fear as she pointed towards a large group of Endermen standing just outside the window. "Then again, everything ELSE about this guy has been pointing to crazy.."

"Chris?" Jess glanced at the young boy nervously, hoping he'd know what to do.

Chris looked just as frightened, staring at the Endermen blocked by the window in shock before shifting his gaze towards the brunette. "Soren always had a weird interest in Endermen, at least that's what Ellegaard told me a while back when I asked about him," he revealed. "But I didn't think it was THIS bad."

"I guess everybody needs hobbies. Even if they are really, really, REALLY dangerous," Jess commented, trying her best not to judge too much. "You think he's actually training Endermen to build stuff?"

"I think HE thinks he's training Endermen to build stuff," Olivia corrected.

"Is that even possible?"

"Soren has strong determination. I'll be more surprised if he hadn't accomplished anything," Chris shrugged.

"Let's look around.. See what we can find out," Jess decided. The two agreed and with that, the trio split up to cover more ground. Jess however stayed at the jukebox, noticing a couple discs sitting on the wall in item frames above the jukebox. Curious, she took one that read 'Totemic Constructions of Peaceful Endermen' before placing it inside the jukebox. Almost immediately the audio began to play.

Jess began to listen in, hearing Soren talking about Endermen and questioning if they were just like sheep and pigs, or if they were a species that many tend to overlook. He wondered if Endermen that were peaceful were able to be intelligent and as the audio neared the end, he mentioned that he was ever so lonely. Although she had bigger things to worry about, Jess couldn't help but to feel bad for him. Sure, he ran away and is probably not right in the head but years of loneliness can do so much to anyone.

After processing the information, Jess leaped up and grabbed the next disc that read 'The Folly of Pumpkins' and slid it in the jukebox. This time, the ginger talked about how in one of his experiments, he wore a pumpkin head to stop the Endermen from attacking him and how this might have altered their behavior. Because of this discovery, he thought of a suit that could be used as camouflage that would help him blend in with the Endermen.

He finished it off by saying that the many pumpkins he had before had now been baked into pumpkin pies. Jess couldn't help but to feel interested in what he was trying to achieve and for a moment, nearly forgot about the mission at hand. She grabbed the next disc that read 'Endermen Observations, Part twenty-seven.' She was surprised. Twenty-seven? Imagine how long it took for him just to do this. She slid the disc in and began to listen.

In this recording, he revealed that he had been watching the Endermen up close and noticed two of them 'communicating,' or at the very least, stood next to each other for a long period of time before parting ways. He commented that it was exciting and that he followed one of them for the next three hours before it abruptly ended there. Jess was confused but moved onto the fourth and final disc that read 'Calls of the Endermen' and placed it in the jukebox.

Unlike the other three, in this recording, he was moaning, groaning and making weird noises then stopped and said 'an Endermen love song' before he continued with the strange moaning and groaning. It ended with him saying that it was all fascinating and while Jess was interested by it, she couldn't help but to feel a bit weirded out.

Realizing the recordings were done, she scanned the area and noticed a couple plants under the light of Redstone lamps. Jess was surprised they were even growing at all but she figured it must've been harder to grow plants since they're not in their native environment.

She then shifted her gaze from the plants and towards Chris, who was sitting wistfully in the corner. He looked exhausted, which Jess couldn't help since they were all tired but he looked so glum, it made her frown a little. "Hey, Chris," she greeted, sitting next to him to see what was up. "How.. you're holding up so far?" Chris was so downhearted and tired that he couldn't find the words and simply shrugged in response. "You're tired? You're.. missing Ellegaard?"

At the mention of his cousin, Chris huffed as he curled up into a ball. "I'm fine.." he grumbled.

Jess was puzzled, but she continued trying, wondering what was bothering the young boy. "Chris, you could talk to me," she assured him. "I know we aren't close or know each other that well, but if you don't mind me asking, what's bothering you?"

"And why do you care?" Chris scowled. "Just leave me alone.."

He truly didn't mean to lash out, but he couldn't help but to feel downhearted and frustrated. Just thinking about Ellegaard was enough to get him upset. He never had a close relationship with his cousin because she was so distant and busy at work, she never really got to spend any time with him, leaving him alone most of the time. When she DOES make time for him, it's always short, awkward and brief. Nothing special at all.

Now they were in a world apocalypse, he hoped this would strengthen their relationship but all he got was the trauma of escaping the ruins of Redstonia. Hearing their people being sucked up into tractor beams, thrown around and slaughtered and his cousin, the only family he knows of storming off on her own to find the F-bomb herself all because of a little disagreement with Magnus.

It hurt enough knowing that he was alone in a gang that he felt out of place in, but seeing how Maggie was already so close to Nikki, it made him feel worse. It wasn't fair. Maggie has a close and loving relationship with her brother and that was something Chris longed to have with Ellegaard. Everyone seemed so close with someone; Maggie, Chris, the siblings, Axel, Olivia.. yet he can't even talk to his own cousin without feeling awkward and it frustrated him.

It was enough that he had to live in her shadow and is expected to be as talented as her. Of course, he loved redstone and inventing but he wished he could have a break. A time where he could feel and feel like a little kid..

Jess was surprised by his outburst, but she remained patient. She knew whatever was bothering him, it wouldn't be a good idea to force him to tell her so she sighed, gazing away from him as she spoke. "I know it's stressful to be in a situation like this. I feel stressed too, but we have to keep our hopes up. For Soren," she said.

"You say that like it's so simple.." Chris sighed.

Jess glanced at him, perplexed. "I'm not following?"

"You think it's so simple.. but it's not as easy as you say.." Chris repeated himself, this time in more detail.

"Y'know.. I didn't say it was going to be easy. All you need is faith, trust and motivation and you'll be prepared for anything."

"..really?"

"I mean, we did survive a big, major crazy WitherStorm that's out to destroy the world. That proves a lot. I think you're pretty smart for your age, Chris," Jess nudged him playfully. "Imagine what any child would do at your age."

Chris began to feel a little bit better but he still felt downhearted. "I'm sorry for being so rude before. It's just that.. it's infuriating.." he sighed.

Jess raised a brow, wondering what he meant. "What is?" She asked.

"You probably don't know this but Ellegaard and I aren't exactly.. close as you would think. Far from it actually. Back in Redstonia, I always had to prove myself that I could be just as intelligent and smart as her. Of course I love redstone but it was so exhausting," he revealed. "I used to call it 'living under Ellie's shadow' but now things are so different I-.. I wanted to bond more because I saw how close everyone else was but things weren't so easy. I wish I wasn't so lonely. And I wish people would understand. I know she's my cousin and all but.. sometimes I wish people would see me for me.."

Jess at first couldn't answer, letting his words sink in for a moment before finding the right words. "I'm so sorry you felt so lonely, Chris and that none of us didn't notice it," she frowned.

"..you wouldn't have known.."

"Well, I know now. We.. didn't get to bond because of the WitherStorm, but you're here with us now. And I promise, I'll help you in the future," Jess consoled, though she kept her distance because she didn't know if Chris was okay with physical contact or not. "Maybe when all this is over, you could start hanging out with us? I'm sure you and Olivia have a lot in common. And Nikki's pretty much your age."

Chris' frown deepened. "I dunno.." he murmured.

Jess thought for a moment before continuing. "I know part of your problem is that you feel lonely.. but it seems like you have a lot of things to work out with your cousin too," she consoled. "I think you have to choose your own path. I know it'll be hard but.. it'll be worth it knowing that you're your own person instead of constantly being seen as just the engineer's cousin. I think you have it in you and I'll have your back if you need it. And not just me.. Olivia, Jesse, Maggie.. we'll all be rooting for you, Chris."

Chris at first remained silent, letting her words replay in his mind before he began to tear up, giving her a tight embrace as he quietly sobbed. "T-Thank you.." he murmured. Jess at first was surprised by this before slowly returning the embrace, wrapping her arms around him to give him the warmth and comfort he needed.

"Hey, guys I-." Olivia started as she trotted towards them but froze when she noticed a downhearted Chris being comforted by Jess. "What happened?" Her dark brown eyes narrowed in concern as she sat next to her friend, wondering what she had missed.

"Chris is dealing with some personal problems," Jess explained. "He just needs a minute."

"I-I'll be fine.." Chris sniffled, wiping away his final tears as he tried to regain his composure. "What do you think the others had found?"

Olivia frowned, disliking when things are kept away from her but since this was for private reasons, she decided not to push the topic further, especially for Chris' sake. "I dunno. Soren's mansion looked huge, but the lab seems to be where the real answers are," she answered before grinning and holding out a piece of blue paper showing three columns and rows, the first three all filled along with the last row with another on the top right corner being filled up as well. She must've found it while they were talking. Olivia bubbled proudly as she held out the piece of paper. "But look what I found!"

"Whoa! What's that?" Jess gasped, her mind bursting with possibilities of what it could mean.

"It's definitely some sort of crafting recipe," Chris observed, pushing his emotions aside to focus on the mission. He then looked puzzled as he noticed how.. simple it looked. "But why would someone as brilliant as Soren need a recipe for a shape that simple? Something's not adding up."

"Because they're not FOR Soren - they're for the Endermen!" Olivia theorized. "This must be what he's trying to teach them to build!"

"Can I see that recipe, Olivia?" Jess asked politely, her friend handing it to her so she could study it. Jess then stood, glancing over at the young boy next to her. "Chris? I'm sure you need some time to yourself to think things over. You mind?"

Chris shook his head. "No, you're right. I guess I just need some time to recover first.." he agreed. "Go find Soren. I could already sense we're close."

Jess nodded before she scanned the blueprint, noticing that she'll need six blocks to finish it. Luckily, a bunch of clay blocks happened to be scattered around the area so all she needed to do was look for them and go outside. It wasn't a hard task, collecting as many clay blocks as she can find, but noticed that she's missing one. Although she needed all of them, she figured that it'll be fine with just five.

With her tasks done, she trotted towards the iron doors that led outside to the Endermen party but before she could walk past, a familiar little bat flew all over her face. She gasped in surprise but instantly recognized him when she noticed his glowing purple eyes.

"Zephyr? What are you doing here?" She said. "I thought you went with Nikki?"

Zephyr didn't answer her question, driving her attention towards an Endermen costume sitting on a clothing rack as he hovered over it. Jess was shocked since she hadn't noticed it at all before, but she understood what the little EnderBat was trying to say.

"You're right. If I want to go out here, I need to put on a disguise," she said. As she trotted towards the costume, she noticed an empty clothing rack next to it, which most likely signaled that it's being put to use. Or is hidden somewhere else. Both works.

"Chris! Olivia! Check it out!" She called as Zephyr perched on her shoulder. Olivia and Chris had perplexed expressions as they joined the brunette to see her new discovery.

"An Enderman.. suit?" Olivia commented. "Either Soren's got a really unique fashion sense, or.. wait a second.."

"Looks like a taller one was hanging there.. but it's missing," Jess observed.

"Because Soren must be wearing it! THIS is the disguise he was talking about!" Chris concluded.

"You mean-."

"In order to WALK amongst the Endermen, you have to BECOME an Enderman!"

The trio shared determined gazes. This was going to be dangerous, but they had all the resources to achieve their goal. Now all they need is for one of them to put on the suit and go outside to finish the recipe. Chris is obviously too small for it and Olivia would be too nervous to go out there herself which left only one option..

"Okay, so. If Soren is using those blueprints to teach the Endermen to build.. And there's a disguise missing from the stand.." Olivia said.

"He must be conducting his experiment right now!" Chris finished. The two smiled at each other, realizing that they finished each other's sentences. Jess was glad to see them get along, but couldn't help but to frown slightly seeing her best friend bonding with someone else.

"Of course! The missing disguise is the one he had to put on before going outside!" Olivia realized.

"Which means if we want to get to Soren.." Jess said before she gazed over at the window where the large party of Endermen sat across from. "We have to go out THERE to do it." Zephyr squeaked proudly, signaling that they had got it. Jess took a good look at the suit before shrugging. "That leftover Enderman suit WOULD fit me. I guess it's time to play dress up!"

Without another word, Jess took the suit from the stand and slid it on, making sure that she got some privacy as she did. Once she was done, she grinned, glancing over at her friends. "How do I look?" She asked.

"I don't think you want our honest opinions," Chris replied before crossing his arms as Olivia eyed the suit down. "But.. it might just do the trick."

Jess gazed up and when she did, she noticed how Olivia suddenly flinched. "You know that's REALLY creepy, right?" She huffed.

"Huh?"

"The endersuit," she specified. "I keep wanting to not look at you. It's so disturbing."

Jess couldn't help but to giggle, seeing how disturbed her friend was by it. "Sorry," she smiled.

"You go ahead and build with those Endermen outside. We'll just wait here," Chris said, though he sounded anxious.

Jess agreed. They had enough playing around. It was time to put the plan into action. She trotted in front of the iron doors, taking a deep breath as Zephyr flew up next to her. "You doin' alright?" She asked. Zephyr squeaked nervously but soon replaced his anxiousness with determination. "I dunno about you, but I don't wanna spend any more time here than I have to." When Zephyr began teasing her for being scared, she huffed and crossed her arms. "Oh, like this place doesn't give you the creeps?"

Jess then gazed away from the EnderBat to avoid accidentally looking directly at him. She didn't want to accidentally upset him before she got the chance to step outside. "Play it cool, Zephyr," she advised before putting her hand on the doorknob. Before she could turn it, Olivia suddenly stopped her.

"Hang in a second. Soren-in-disguise looks like any old Endermen.. and so will you," she pointed out. "How are you going to find him? Walk up to every Enderman out there and say 'hey, are you Soren?'"

"Olivia makes a VALID point," Chris agreed. "The whole point of the disguise is to AVOID that kind of attention. If you make any weird movements, it could mean trouble."

"Soren's trying to teach the Endermen to build the shape in those instructions, right?" Jess replied. "I get if I complete it, that would REALLY get his attention."

"Try not to die, okay..? I'd really hate to have to watch that. From behind this protective glass," Olivia frowned, having second thoughts on letting her best friend go out there by herself. Jess noticed both hers and Chris' worried expressions and couldn't help but to feel flattered that they were worried about her.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," she replied nervously in sarcasm, walking through the iron doors and outside with Zephyr by her side. She glanced at the bat next to her, a determined expression sitting on her face. "Okay. We've just gotta get Soren's attention.. and avoid attracting THEIRS."

She felt some of her leftover confidence abandon her as she stared at the group of mobs in front of her. There were so many, much more than what she could imagine. Zephyr squeaked, offering to take the lead when he noticed how scared she looked. She agreed and as the two slowly made their way through the crowd, one of the Endermen drew closer to her.

She flinched in alarm, closing her eyes as Zephyr flew in front of her, the two having a staring contest for a minute before the Enderman eventually backed off, leaving them alone. Jess breathed a heavy sigh in relief as Zephyr guided the rest of the way. As they went, Jess noticed an Enderman holding a clay block, the last one she needs to finish the recipe.

"Zeph, over here," she whispered towards the EnderBat before trotting closer to the Enderman. What freaked her out the most was how emotionless it seemed, staring deep into her soul. As Zephyr distracted him, she slowly took the block from his grasp. He didn't react to the missing block for a moment but when he noticed, he began to freak out, angrily searching for where his block must've landed off to.

"Uh oh.." Jess whimpered but she didn't put much thought into it as Zephyr guided her to the building grid. She grinned, scratching his ears affectionately. "Thanks Zeph!" She then took out the grid, rereading it through. "Lemme just take another look at the instructions.." Once she was done, she shrugged. "Nothing I can't handle."

Without another word, she placed the grids in the right places. It didn't take her very long and once she was done, she admired her work proudly. "False evidence of Endermen intelligence: accomplished!" She said. She gazed up at Zephyr, her smile fading when she noticed his panicked expression. She was confused before looking to see what was going on. Her stomach dropped when she realized what was happening. The Endermen were going nuts!

"Uh.. nothing to see here, guys. Just walk away," she chuckled nervously but when she noticed the Endermen were all approaching her, all her calmness left her as she began to panic. "Okay, they're not walking away. Definitely not walking away. Zephyr, help me!"

The EnderBat tried doing as many things as best as he could, trying to lure the Endermen away or at least calm them down but all his attempts failed. "I AM sorry about this, but.. it has to look real," a strange, familiar voice said but before Jess could make sense to who it could belong to, she was suddenly knocked out cold in a single hit.

◦●●◉✿ Chapter 2: A Gift of Song! And water ✿◉●●◦

Soren patiently sat on the floor as he waited for this mystery person to wake up. Just before, he had been conducting his experiment in peace before this strange teenager came in, dressed in his unused Enderman suit and built what the real Enderman were supposed to be building.

He wondered how she got the recipe and knew about his experiment, let alone even come to the End in the first place. He even wondered how she even has a pet EnderBat. For all he knows, those species are incredibly rare and so rare in fact, he had only seen one and that was from a distance. His thoughts were suddenly interrupted when the teenager started to stir.

"I don't think it'll bruise. Your face, I mean," he sheepishly said. Jess was confused, recognizing the voice but can't tell who it belonged to. "Those suits were built with durability in mind."

Once she fully regained consciousness, her eyes widened as she slowly pulled herself from the ground, spotting the ginger before her. He had pale skin with ginger hair and beard and wore black, orange, yellow and brown colored armor. She noticed that Olivia and Chris had both vanished but she didn't put her mind on it as she faced the ginger before her.

"You must be Soren," she guessed.

"I am. But must I be?" Soren replied. "I'm not sure if I want to sometimes. Sometimes, I'd rather be anything but Soren.. ooh, like a donkey, for example!"

"You have to help me," Jess said, getting straight to the point.

"I just did," the ginger scoffed.

"You hit me. Hard. In the face."

"You upset the Endermen. And I got you to safety."

Jess at first was going to argue, but froze when she realized he had a point. She couldn't argue with that logic. The ginger then stood, gazing down at her in a confused manner.

"By the way, as far as introductions are concerned.. this is not going very well," he said, facing his back towards her as he walked a few blocks away from her.

"We're in danger," Jess said straight-up but was confused when she didn't get the answer she hoped.

"Oh, what else is new? Whatever your issue is.. whatever your problem is.. it has occurred before, and has been solved before," Soren scoffed though he felt curious as to how far she was willing to go to stop.. whatever this so-called problem was. He felt a little bit of respect for her, knowing the dangers and risks for going into the End just to look for him. "Even so, what do you need me for? I've gone out of my way to avoid these types of problems. I don't even remember what it looks like up there."

Jess decided to take a more.. slower approach. She needed to be patient if she was actually going to have a chance to win the ginger's trust. "I need you to be a hero," she said.

"I see. And what do you think a 'hero' would do in this situation?"

"A hero would give me his Formidi-Bomb."

For a split second, Jess thought he might actually consider going with them back to the Overworld to fix the problem. When she gazed at the protective window where the Endermen were still going wild outside, she realized Soren was taking too long to think.

"There's a WitherStorm on the loose and it's eating the world," she finally confessed.

"Ah, I see! You misspoke. You don't need me. You need my stuff," Soren corrected as his eyes darkened. "Well.. I found when you give people what they want, they TURN on you." He walked past her and towards the barely growing plants. "They become resentful. They show their true colors."

"Who turned on you?"

"All of them! It's why I prefer Endermen. They always do what you expect, almost to a fault," he explained as he placed his hands on one of the flower pots, refusing to meet her gaze. "You're a stranger.. And what you're asking for is too dangerous."

Jess felt a wave of sympathy wash over her as she imagined the pain and struggle that he must've gone through. The thought of your best friends just using you and then abandoning you when you're no longer needed is something no one should have to go through. She glanced down on her shoulder when she felt something perch on it and she gazed down to see Zephyr sitting right there, his eyes sparkling in relief to see she's okay. He glanced at Soren before nodding, signaling that it's a good time to tell him.

"I have the amulet," she said.

"What?"

She pulled the amulet from her pocket, revealing it to him. "Gabriel gave it to me."

"Gabriel?" He finally faced her, his eyes lighting up in interest.

"Gabriel asked me to reassemble the Order of the Stone."

"The Order of the Stone?! They.. asked for me..?" He repeated, sounding very surprised. "I always know they needed me, but I was never sure if they wanted me."

"Gabriel is your friend," Jess assured him. "And so is Magnus and Ellegaard."

Soren suddenly seemed unsure. "Hmmm.. I don't know.." he murmured. "Do they ever talk about me?"

"Uhh.. sure."

"What kind of things do they say?"

"That you were missed."

His eyes widened. "..Really..?"

"Maybe it was more miss-ing.. you have to read between the lines."

"Yes, yes you do.. but what about you? Are you my friend?" He gave her almost pleading eyes, his desperation for company showing. "As long as we're on the subject. Not to.. put you on the spot."

Considering what the ginger has been through, Jess didn't see the problem with agreeing to be his friend. She knew what it felt like to be abandoned, but the thought of being lonely for years and thinking that all the people you know hated you was something that she couldn't even bear to imagine going through. "Sure!" She grinned.

She watched as the ginger's face brightened. "That's the best thing I've heard in years," he beamed before scratching the back of his neck nervously. "Admittedly, that's not a very high bar." He then smiled and placed a hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry, I'm going to help you.. because that's what friends do." He then trotted away from her. "Before we leave I'm going to give my old friends a gift. The gift of song!"

Jess raised a brow, wondering what he meant but she was excited to find out. Was he going to play a song for her? Or tell her more about his past experiences? Her answer came when the ginger started singing and as soon as he did, Jesse frantically, but quietly walked into the room.

"Gary may seem scary but he's a swell guy," Soren sang, gesturing to one of the Endermen by the window before gesturing towards another one. "Sally, dilly dallies, but give her credit, she tries."

"What the fuck..?" Jesse muttered under his breath, but Jess placed a hand on his shoulder as she gave him an assuring smile as Nikki, looking equally perplexed joined them as well. Zephyr, glad to see his owner, moved onto her shoulder as the four listened in tune to the song.

"They might look the same to the untrained eyes.. But that's a lie and so I say.."

Before he could go on, he was suddenly interrupted by Lukas budging in. They all glanced at him, puzzled but Soren seemed even more puzzled when he noticed Jess' siblings now with her. He raised a brow, now starting to feel a little awkward.

"Wait, is that..? Are you..?" Lukas gasped.

"Soren!" Maggie rejoiced, shoving the blonde out of the way as she and Soren trotted up to him. Lukas scowled at her rudeness but he didn't drag it any further as they focused their attention on the ginger.

"Whoa!" Axel gasped in awe.

"Years of just hearing stories from my older brother and only having a couple memories that I could hardly recall, it feels so weird to actually see you again," Maggie said casually. "Wassup Soren!"

"Yeah, totally.." Chris raised a brow upon hearing Maggie's words but shrugged it off as he faced the ginger. "Hello, Soren. We've been looking for you this entire time."

Soren raised a brow, seemingly looking perplexed. He recognized these children from somewhere but he couldn't exactly wrap his head around it. When he realized who they were, he coughed a little. "O-Oh! You must be.. Maggie and.. Christina?" He recalled.

"Chris," Chris corrected, nudging Maggie when he noticed her snickering at Soren's mistake.

"Ah yes my apologies!" Soren said. "My, you two have really grown.." He refused to meet their gazes. He almost felt sorta awkward that he was standing in front of the young relatives of his former teammates and that they actually remembered him. He cleared his throat to say something but froze when he heard a cough. He shifted his gaze to where the cough was coming from and noticed Petra and how pasty and weak she looked, the WitherSickness getting worse.

When she noticed everyone staring at her, she tried to seem as normal as she possibly can. "Nice to meet you, Soren," she said before starting to cough once more.

"You look.. terrible," Soren frowned, recognizing the WitherSickness as he stepped closer to her to get a better look. He then froze when he noticed everyone's eyes widening, spotting the danger they were in now. Soren, not noticing it yet, glanced at everyone in a confusing manner before slowly turning his head to see what they were looking at and spotted multiple Endermen teleporting inside the room.

Instinctively, everyone shielded their eyes to avoid deepening angering the already pissed off Endermen. But that was strange. Wasn't the window supposed to keep them out?

"Seems a bit odd.." Soren whispered. "They've never been inside before."

"What's happening?" Jess asked frantically, but instead of getting an answer, they heard an Enderman screeching loudly.

"You've upset them," Soren explained, remembering how she got the Endermen upset back outside. "You've altered their behavior!"

"Okay, let's go. Zephyr, lead the way," Jesse ordered, allowing for the EnderBat to safely lead them outside of the lab and into the main hallway. Nikki was the first to peek her head outside but gasped when she spotted what was awaiting them on the other side.

"And the hits just keep on comin'," she groaned. The team ducked behind one of the tables, unable to move any further without provoking any of the many Endermen roaming the halls.

"I wasn't expecting so many houseguests - there's no way I have enough seashell soaps for all of them," Soren fretted.

"Cool then how the hell we supposed to get out of here?" Maggie huffed.

"We need to come up with a plan," Lukas responded. "And not our usual we'll-come-up-with-a-plan-when-we-have-to-oh-wait-now-we-have-to kind of plan." Olivia hushed him as he raised his voice.

"Soren, you've been studying Endermen for ages - any bright ideas?" Jess glanced at the ginger, hoping he'll know a strategy to bypass the Endermen.

"One constant about Endermen is that they hate water. If we can force that fountain to overflow somehow.." Soren explained, the team glancing over at the water fountain out of their reach.

"But Zephyr can't do this on his own," Jess frowned.

"You're right about that, but Jess, you still have the Enderman suit. Put that on, and you'll be able to safely reach the fountain," Soren instructed.

Jess' frown deepened but she couldn't help but to admit that it'll probably be the only chance they have. She pulled the helmet from her inventory, cringed, then placed it on her head. "Just when I thought I'd never have to smell this thing again.." she sighed before stepping forward to start the plan.

"Good luck, dude," Axel said.

"And be careful," Jesse sighed.

"Always am," Jess assured them, Zephyr flying above her head to help guide her.

"Well, um.. watch from here, then! Where it's safe," Nikki called.

Jess rolled her eyes playfully as she crept past the Endermen. She felt her stomach drop as she locked eyes with one of them, who blankly stared back at her. She was so focused on this, she didn't even realize that Zephyr was warning her that another Enderman was in front of her until she bumped into it.

She flinched in alarm, bracing herself from impact but when she noticed that it simply walked away, she sighed in relief. Zephyr squeaked, scolding that she should've paid attention to where she was going and that she needed to focus.

"I know, I'm sorry Zeph," Jess whispered, being careful to not be too loud. "I-."

"Try not to die!" Soren called, unintentionally interrupting her. She shifted her gaze towards where he was in slight annoyance before continuing on. Once she found herself in front of the fountain, she swiftly broke as many blocks holding back the water as she could. The water

poured out freely, causing the Endermen to screech in alarm as they teleported to the second floor for safety.

"Yes!" Jess rejoiced, their plan working like a charm. "C'mon, guys, it's clear!"

When the rest realized they were out of danger, they crept along, but as soon as they turned a corner, they spotted more Endermen blocking their way.

"Oh no.." Jess whimpered.

"We're gonna die," Lukas fretted. Reuben huffed, shoving Axel away. The big guy was caught off guard by this and ended up plummeting down, making a loud splash as he collided with the ground that was covered in water. Jesse held his arm, helping him recover from his sudden fall.

"Nobody's gonna die," Jess huffed, spotting a second fountain. "Because I'm going to break that other fountain. Zephyr, cover me."

The EnderBat led the way, holding off any Endermen that came too close as Jess crept her way to the fountain. At some point, an Enderman teleported in front of her, blankly staring down at her. She flinched in alarm but mimicking their behavior, she remained quiet, the two having a staring competition for a moment before the Enderman walked away.

Jess breathed a heavy sigh in relief before Zephyr guided her to the fountain. Once she approached it, she cracked her knuckles. "Fountain number two - prepare to meet your doom," she commented before destroying the barrier holding the water away. Like before, the water flowed out and the Endermen screeched in alarm as they teleported from harm's way.

"Okay, everybody - let's go!" Jess ordered. On cue, Axel yelped as he raced towards the exit, the rest of the team following after him. Jess was the last to follow, making sure they were completely safe from harm as the loud screeching of the Endermen filled her tears. Once they arrived at the exit, the gang came to a sudden halt. Jess was perplexed, wondering why everyone had stopped.

"What's the holdup?" She asked.

At first, she got no response before Jesse finally gulped. "Uh, sis? I think it's better if you see ur for yourself."

Jess was even more puzzled but shoved her way to the front to see what was going on. She gasped when she noticed that the Wool World had become a new breeding place for Endermen with many of them standing at each corner. It even seemed way more crowded than the place where Soren was conducting his experiment.

"They're everywhere. How are we supposed to get through this?" Lukas quavered. "I mean physically and psychologically. Say we somehow make it.."

"I can't see how this won't become a reoccurring nightmare," Maggie shivered.

"Keep your eyes down, everyone - and grab onto me," Jess ordered.

"I guess if this is the only way we're gonna make it back to the trap door.." Nikki figured as she held onto her. The rest of the team did as well, forming a line and once everyone was put into place, Jess slowly ventured on. Jess nodded at Zephyr to go, the EnderBat flying forward and guiding them through.

Jess didn't get any attention from the Endermen yet she felt every single one had their eyes on her. She could even hear some teleporting around and what freaked her out was that they sounded so close. She tried to push this fear aside as she guided her friends but when they got onto the bridge, she made the mistake to look back, starting to have second thoughts.

"Maybe we should, uh, turn around.." she murmured but noticed many of them standing in front of her and looking suspicious. "Or.. not."

They were now surrounding them. Zephyr tried to get them to back off but they only came closer. Before Jess could speak, an Enderman teleported in front of her, gazing down at her curiously before lowering down to have a closer look at her.

"This guy's right in my face!" Jess whimpered, keeping her voice low. The Enderman sniffed her for a few seconds before it backed away. For a moment, Jess thought he had fallen for her disguise but she was proven wrong when he screeched right in her face. He must've realized that she wasn't like them and was now alarming his friends.

Jess screamed but acted fast to safe herself, siblings, and friends from getting caught. "Quick! In the water!" She ordered. She broke the railings and allowed everyone else to hop in first before she jumped inside as well. They were safe in the water but now they were completely surrounded by Endermen intending to kill them.

"Oh! When I constructed this place, I worried how flammable my building was," Soren remembered. "So I installed a fire suppression system to prevent the whole thing from going up in flames!"

"So.. there's more water?" Jesse guessed.

"Much more!" Soren nodded. "If we activate it, it could disperse all these Endermen while we swim to safety!"

"Can we reach the controls from here?" Jess inquired.

"The lever is right up there," he pointed up to a ladder that led to a high platform. It'll be dangerous but it's at least a solid solution to get past all these Endermen.

"But what about Zephyr? The water would hurt him too!" Nikki frowned.

"There's no doubt about that. We must find a way to protect him."

"I dunno if we'll be able to reach all the way up there without getting any more unwanted attention," Maggie pointed out. "How about he pulls the lever and then let's see if he'll be able to fly all the way to the trapdoor before the water overflows?"

"That sounds risky.. but I guess it's the only idea we have," Nikki sighed before glancing over at her pet EnderBat. "Okay, buddy. This is going to be big so listen up: I want you to go up there and pull the lever, K? But as soon as you do, get out of here. I don't want you to get hurt."

Zephyr nodded his head before swiftly flying up to the platform and flipping the lever. Luckily for him, the water didn't come immediately so he took this advantage to bolt for the trapdoor. When he noticed that it was closed, he huffed, his eyes glowing intensely as he flew towards the trapdoor at high speeds before he vanished, teleporting out of the building and to safety.

Once the EnderBat was gone and safe, Nikki sighed in relief before glancing at her siblings, noticing they both seemed extremely anxious. "He did it!" She said.

"Great. We don't know how much water this thing is going to kick out, so everybody-." Jesse started but was interrupted by a loud sound and Endermen screeching in alarm. Soren was right! The water levels were raising which meant that it was safe to go.

"It's working!" Lukas beamed.

"Well done. Now, time to swim to that trap door!" Soren advised.

Without another word, the team took a deep breath and dived down, swimming for the trapdoor. Maggie took the lead this time. Since she was an excellent swimmer and could hold her breath for long periods of time, she made sure everyone made it across. Once they arrived, she opened the trapdoor and held it open, allowing for everyone to escape.

As he approached the exit, Jesse turned around and noticed Petra nearby having trouble swimming. In order to save her life, he swam back to her and took her hand, guiding her towards the exit and helping her out. Once everyone was safe, Maggie swam out and closed the trap door behind her..

◦●●◉✿ Chapter 3: Issues Resolved? ✿◉●●◦

Everyone screamed as they flew out of the End Portal. After regaining their composures, they shared a look of relief. They escaped the Endermen's clutches and had all made it out safely! Jess beamed as she took the Enderman mask off her head.

"We made it!" She grinned.

"'Making it' is relative.." Soren huffed as he dusted himself off.

Before anyone could reply, Petra suddenly yelped, pointing in front of them. The monsters from before hadn't disappeared and were waiting for them to return so they could continue their attack. They could even hear a zombie groaning as it slowly moved towards them.

"Oh, come on!" Jesse complained, drawing his sword and whacking the zombie onto the ground and stabbing it, killing it instantly. He thought he had it until he spotted two skeletons aiming their arrows at him. He shivered before ducking behind the stone brick walls, the others doing the same to avoid getting hit.

"Not that this isn't a ton of fun, but - let's grab that Formidi-Bomb and get out of here!" Maggie huffed as she punched a zombie that was coming close to them in the face, killing it instantly.

"One small problem. Tiny, really. Miniscule," Soren said awkwardly, drawing his sword and whacking down an incoming zombie and stabbing it dead. "I haven't actually built it yet!"

"That's a 'SMALL problem?!'" Jesse said in disbelief.

"You all seem like people who appreciates cool stuff that's cool for no reason."

"Thanks-?"

"Go ahead and throw that lever behind you!"

Jesse at first was confused but noticing what lever he meant, he leapt forward, being careful not to get hit by oncoming arrows and flipped it.

Once he did, Soren smirked as pumpkin heads fell onto irons into a T-shape, spawning multiple iron golems. "Hold onto your socks - 'cause they're about to get blown off!" The ginger beamed. "Go to work, boys!"

Reuben squealed in alarm as the golems killed the monsters brutally; smashing them into walls, throwing them around and smashing them until all there was left was dust. Even Soren had to cringe from the gruesome sight and he even flinched when a skeleton was thrown into a wall right by them, killing it instantly.

"When those golems are done with the monsters.. they won't attack us, will they?" Jesse asked just to make sure.

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," Soren simply responded, leaving him confused.

"That.. didn't actually-."

"Ask-me-no-questions!"

Jesse seemed taken aback by his sudden rudeness but he didn't drag it any further as Soren signaled the golems to follow them as he guided them back into the loot room. Jess took a deep sigh in relief to be back in this room again, but she couldn't help but to admit it felt different than when they were inside the last time.

"Do you guys hear that?" Axel asked.

"Hear what?" Nikki inquired.

"All that stuff whispering, 'Take me. Take me now.'"

"I think it's saying.. 'Olivia should get to take more than Axel,'" Olivia commented. "But why? 'Because she's cooler!'"

"Aw. C'mon, loot - I thought you and me were tight!" Axel huffed.

"It wouldn't hurt to take a few things, would it?" Chris figured.

"And by 'few' you mean 'all,' right?" Maggie corrected.

"I'll just fetch the Super TNT. It's right up - there!" Soren said, pointing to a platform with a bunch of chests above the entrance. It didn't have any scolding or ladder to reach up to it so everyone was confused as to how he would reach it.

"How are you gonna get up there?" Chris questioned.

"Oh, I have my ways.." Soren replied, the golems kneeling down and making a pathway for him. Soren gladly climbed up them before glancing back down at the rest of the team. "Oh, and feel free to help yourselves! Just make sure to keep an eye out for the gunpowder we'll need to make the Formidi-Bomb."

With that, the team all splitted up. Jess scanned the room and noticed Olivia and Chris talking as they dug through a couple chests. They had barely gotten time to actually know each other yet looked like they had known each other for a long time. She felt like she was stabbed in the stomach seeing her best friend being so close with.. someone else but she quickly shook her head, clearing any negative thoughts. She was probably overreacting.. besides, it was nice to see Chris finally bonding with others.

She glanced over at Lukas and Petra sitting together nearby, noticing Petra's WitherSickness getting worse. Her eyes narrowed in concern as she trotted over to them. "Are you both doing okay?" She asked.

"It's gotten really bad," Lukas sighed. "Part of me is hoping that - when we bomb this WitherStorm, this sickness will just.. dissipate."

"Sure will be nice, huh?" Petra smiled weakly.

"It makes sense, doesn't it?"

"I had the same thought!" Jess agreed. "Once the Wither is gone, it'll probably cure Petra's WitherSickness."

"Fingers crossed, right?"

"Toes, too."

"And uh, Jess..? I told everyone about Petra's WitherSickness when we were back in Soren's place in The End," Lukas said. "I know I probably wouldn't have but.. I couldn't wait any longer."

"I just wished you could've let me talk a little more.." Petra coughed.

"No no it's okay! There's no need to apologize, Lukas," Jess assured him.

Lukas nodded his head before frowning and crossing his arms. "Great. I know that we have bigger things to worry about.. but I'm trying to work up the nerve to finally apologize," he said, sorrowly glancing over at Jesse digging through a chest nearby. "If he'll let me at least.."

"I'll try talking to him. I promise," Jess replied, but even she wasn't too sure if it'll be enough to fix their broken friendship.

Jesse meanwhile had been scanning the area, hoping to find some gunpowder but froze when he noticed Axel sitting alone instead of searching for as much loot he could find. He grew concerned as he slowly started to approach him. "Are you in paradise or what?" He asked.

"Honestly? I'm more in 'what' right now," Axel sighed. "All this power went straight to my head - and then I got a head rush - and now I'm too overwhelmed to take anything!"

"Stay strong, Axel."

"I'll try.." the big guy sighed but when he noticed his friend was about to talk away, his eyes widened in alarm. "Wait-! Jesse? I-.. I just want to say.. after all we've been through together, I'm glad I get to be here with you."

Jesse smiled, feeling flattered by his words. "Thanks, Axel.."

Jesse scanned the room, noticing Nikki talking to Maggie nearby. Curious, he joined them, wondering what they were discussing. "Hey, Nikki," he said. "And.. Maggie. What's up?"

"Doin' real swell," Maggie lied before sighing. "Just.. not in the mood for takin' loot, I guess.."

"Maggie.." Nikki frowned, giving her friend a concerned expression.

Jesse knew that she was upset and it didn't take him long to guess that she was most likely sulking over Magnus. He couldn't blame her; if Jess or Nikki ran away and he didn't know where they were, he would've been upset as well.

"This is about Magnus, right?" He guessed.

Maggie hesitated before staring down at the ground downheartedly to refuse to meet their gazes. "..it's just that.. it's one thing being in one piece and still trying to keep goin' the world hanging on your shoulders. It's another to be separated from your only family and being trapped with a bunch of new people, wondering and hoping if he's okay or not.." she lamented. "I dunno, I just feel kind of.. hopeless."

Nikki held her hand, giving her a determined expression. "Maggie, you're part of the team as any of us are. We'll find Magnus before it's too late," she assured her. "It hasn't been long since we've spent time with each other but I care about you. I just want to see you happy."

Jesse placed a hand on his sister's shoulder, awkwardly backing her up before taking his attention onto Maggie. "Nikki's right. I know there's nothing we can do now but we'll help you find him as soon as this WitherStorm is dealt with," he assured her.

Maggie scratched the back nervously. "Thanks.. thank you for that," she said.

Nikki couldn't help but to smile a little seeing how nervous she was. "Ooooo is Maggie, the sister of Magnus the Rogue now getting nervous?" She teased.

Maggie felt her heart fluttering, her face burning up slightly as she huffed and crossed her arms. "What-? No! No way.." she said. "I'm just-.. working up the nerve so I could show that WitherStorm who's it's messing with!"

"Yeah sure," Nikki snickered. Maggie huffed once more but her frown curled into a smile as a couple giggles escaped from her lips. Jesse meanwhile felt even more awkward, now starting to feel like a third wheel.

"Anyways, Nikki. And.. Nikki's brother. Thanks for being there for me just now. I-.. really needed that," Maggie's smile widened as her face burned up slightly.

"Hey, if you need anything, I'll be here. Besides, it's the least I could do after you heard me out yesterday," Nikki assured her. Maggie didn't respond and the two locked eyes for a moment before she gave her a tight embrace. Nikki was surprised by this but smiled warmly, wrapping her arms around her as she returned the hug.

Jesse didn't know what to say, not expecting to see the two get to close in just a matter of days. He was just about to intervene when he felt a soft tap on his shoulder. Confused, he turned around and spotted Jess standing behind him with a concerned expression on her face.

"Jesse, we have to talk," she said.

Jesse frowned and crossed his arms as he faced her. "About what?"

"You know what I'm talking about."

"If this is about Lukas then I'm not listening!"

"Jesse, listen. I haven't been.. the best since we've gotten wrapped in this mess," Jess sighed. "But you need to hear me out."

Jesse scowled, but letting curiosity get the better of him, he gave in. "I'm listening."

"This whole time, you and Lukas have been fighting this entire time and at first, I thought it was something smaller, that you and Axel assumed he was something he wasn't. But.. I was wrong. It was something deeper. Something that you've never told me and that led to all this pointless drama," Jess explained before taking a deep breath and continuing. "I should've asked why you hated him so much instead of assuming. But now.. I know why."

"..it's something I don't want to talk about, sis," Jesse admitted with a sigh. "And something I wanted to leave behind."

"You have every right to be mad. And not just at Lukas but at me too for intervening in something I have no knowledge about. There's nothing I could do to fix anything, but I can tell you this; people can change and sometimes things aren't as bleak as they seem."

"Seriously? You're my sister! You're supposed to be on MY side! You weren't even there when it happened. What you need to understand is that some things are too far broken to be fixed. Lukas had his chance to really prove if he's really my friend and he fucked it up for himself."

"That's only because he was forced to stay quiet because of Aiden. You could be pissed off at Lukas all you want but Aiden is the one you should really be mad at. Jesse, I don't have to be on anyone's side! I'm the only one trying to find a solution here!" Jess scowled before pausing and taking a deep breath.

She knew she wouldn't be able to solve this by starting up more arguments. "Remember that day when I was upset and you and Velvet were there to help calm me down and we had that long deep conversation about change and our dad and stuff?" She recalled. "Things could change Jesse. I talked to Lukas about this before and he felt extremely guilty that day it

happened. It doesn't change how Lukas hurt you but please, he's trying his best to make it up to you."

Jesse remained quiet, unable to find the right words. Sure, people CAN change but the only thing he could associate Lukas with was how he hurt him and how he picked his bullies over him. It wasn't fair. Life wasn't fair, but even he had to admit that he's tired of dealing with the conflict.

"You're right.. I'll never forgive him for what he did," he scowled. "If he's really sorry, I'll have to hear it from him.."

Jess frowned, displeased with his answer. "Maybe you'll actually hear it from him and you weren't too busy ignoring and being hostile to him," she pointed out before sighing. "Since you won't listen to me, just promise me that you'll talk things out?"

Jesse's frown deepened but suddenly, he noticed a lever sitting nearby. Ignoring her question, he approached it and flipped it. Almost instantly, a secret passageway opened with minecarts on top of rails rolling out to let riders climb into them. Jesse guessed it either led outside or deeper into the fortress.

"Cool.." he gasped before glancing back at his sister. "We should.. probably head back. Soren might be done by now."

Jess frowned, but she didn't protest. She knew he was trying to avoid talking about the sensitive topic any longer, but technically there was nothing she could do about it. The two approached the high platform the ginger was working on, hoping that he had finished.

"Hey.. Soren?" Jesse called.

"Jesse?" Soren responded.

"I think I've almost got enough gunpowder now!"

"Glad to hear it! And Jesse - I'm sorry for not keeping this place as organized as I should. It's very embarrassing," Soren apologized as he slid down the iron golems. He then whipped out the Super TNT. It was a dark red color and had an orange-yellow glow to it. "And this is my Super TNT."

"Wait.. But I thought Super TNT was the Formidi-Bomb.." Olivia raised a brow.

"Of course not! They're two completely different words, aren't they?"

"Do we just combine this with the gunpowder..?" Nikki inquired.

"The crafting recipe is quite simple really.." Soren explained. "Super TNT in the middle, and gunpowder all around."

"Got it!"

She raised her hands to try and grab it but Soren backed away, not allowing her to get her hands on it.

"No! No, no, no!" He scowled. "The ingredients are highly unstable - even putting them in close proximity to each other is a risk!"

"Okay.. well.. we may not have the Formidi-Bomb yet, but at least we finally have the ingredients to build one," Jess figured, placing her hands on her hips. "Progress!"

"And now that we have them, we..? Ahem. We..?"

Everyone seemed puzzled, wondering what he was trying to say.

"I literally don't remember. You're going to have to help me out a little. Looking for any information here."

"Now we just need to find a way to get it inside the WitherStorm to blow it up!" Jesse reexplained. Before he could answer, he spotted an Enderman teleporting by the door and his eyes instantly widened in fear. He could tell the others noticed it too since they immediately began to shield their eyes.

"Oh, dear.. I was afraid of this. With The End underwater, the Endermen will try to escape," Soren fretted.

Reuben yelped in fear as he trembled, staying close to his owner for comfort. "Maybe we should leave before any more of them show up," Jesse advised.

"Of course, of course - to the mine carts, everyone!" Soren ordered, the gang bolting for the minecarts to escape. "I've been waiting for ages to say that.. to people, I mean.."

As everyone climbed into the minecarts, more Endermen began to teleport into the room and some even started screeching because they recognized them as the people who flooded their home. Nikki noticed the red rails activating and with that, they zoomed forward down the long hallway as the door closely closed behind them. She couldn't help but to shiver, wondering what'll await them on the other side..

◦●●◉✿ About the Author ✿◉●●◦

Hello, I'm Isabella, Izzy for short! Just your average teen making fanfics about her favorite shows and stuff LOL. I'm in a shit ton of fandoms and I'm interested in starting new fanfics outside of MCSM. This includes:

MCSM ⚔️ (I will stay in the fandom until I die)
Avatar, the Last Airbender/Legend of Korra 🌊🪨🔥💨
Heathers (mostly the movie) ❤️💚💛💙
The Owl House 🦉
Amphibia 🐸
MLP 🦄
Voltron 🪐
Precure 🪄
The Babysitters Club (graphic novels only) 👶🏾
Winx Club 🧚‍♀️
Sofia the First (kinda) 👸
Ever After High 🧚
Monster High 👾
Royale High 👑
Rainbow Magic 🧚‍♂️
The Ghost and Molly McGee 👻

I also ship a shit ton of stuff like McSawyer, Jesstra, Jetra, Lukesse, Sashannarcy, Lumity, Raeda, Huntlow, Klance, Rarijack, Flutterdash, Twipie + Sunset. A lot more that I'm too lazy to list lol. I also include OC's.. if that's fine with any of y'all, I love adding OC's 😭😭 I hope y'all enjoy my stories and have a wonderful day:D

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